

Agency Profile

University of Alaska Center for Economic Development

by Cindy Ripplinger, NBA Community Development Department



Annette Johnson, Executive Director

The University of Alaska recently created the Center for Economic Development and appointed Annette Johnson as executive director. The Center is a joint venture between the University of Alaska Anchorage and the University of Alaska Fairbanks to provide assistance to those organizations involved in the betterment of local economies. The Center for Economic Development is solely client-driven. Funding for the center is provided by the University of Alaska, the United States Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration and the State of Alaska's Department of Commerce and Economic Development.

The UA Center for Economic Development's mission is geared to rural Alaskan organizations interested in developing projects and small businesses that are important to the well-being of a small village

or community. The center is one of approximately 60 nationwide where university faculty and students are called upon for their expertise and capabilities to assist with economic development. Students and faculty from Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau campuses, as well as outreach campus sites and community locations, apply their knowledge and skills to provide assistance when needed.

When should an organization seek assistance from the UA Center for Economic Development?

- An organization should seek assistance after consensus is established within the organization.
- If in mid-stream of a project your organization runs up against problems the Center is available to assist in achieving solutions.
- The center serves as an information resource – a place to find answers on technical assistance, financing and project development.
- If your organization desires to develop long-term goals and plans for itself – the center can assist with strategic planning assistance.
- During the early stages of new product ventures or project creation, research assistance can be obtained to determine whether a market exists, sometimes necessitating evaluation and feasibility studies – at times, a complex and intricate component of planning.

The seaweed feasibility study underway in Sitka is a good example. This is a project to explore a means of providing a desired product – seaweed – in Alaska without hav-

ing to import the nori seaweed from Japan. For those not familiar with seaweed, this type of seaweed is processed in flat sheets and is commonly rolled around sushi. The Sitka Tribes of Alaska are exploring a domestic version of seaweed known as porphyra as an import substitute. The center's role in this project is providing assistance in compiling facts and figures to determine the market feasibility of such a venture.

In another example of providing technical assistance to organizations, a research study was initiated this summer to determine whether St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Nome could be restored and at what cost – with hopes of increasing tourism activities in Nome. The appealing historical features of St. Joseph's Church include the rose pattern stained glass window and a spire with a bell tower.

The center's Johnson brings to Alaska a multitude of experience and talent. She was previously director of the Rural Oregon Di-

versification Program at Eastern Oregon State College. She earned an MBA from the University of Portland and currently serves on the board of directors of the National Association of Management and Technical Assistance Centers.

In every organization there are challenges to meet. The UA Center for Economic Development is no exception. Establishing "successes" and using these successes to leverage future growth and community expansion is a challenge posed to Johnson and the center.

No organization will be turned away for inability to pay. If you would like to know more about the center, please call **Annette Johnson** at 786-4170 or write to 3211 Providence Drive, BEB Room 223, Anchorage, AK 99508-8243.

NBA welcomes Annette Johnson to Alaska and wishes the UA Center for Economic Development the best in their mission to provide assistance to rural Alaska organizations! ■



Old St. Joseph's Church in Nome.